Collective Action, Social Movements and Social Technologies

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Abstract

This manuscript introduces the Collective Action, Social Movements and Social Technologies mini track for HICSS 2019. Relevant definitions are provided with a brief overview of IS work in this area. Three papers accepted to this mini track are summarized.

1. Introduction and Concept Definitions

The rise of social media has birthed an age of protest and resistance unique to our time. While collective action and social movement phenomena are not new, the processes and outcomes of social activism have been revolutionized by social technologies such as Twitter, Facebook and tumbler. Given the emergent nature of social activism toward collective actions and social movements, scholars must agree on terminology and definitions before a cumulative tradition of research can be established. In this article, we provide some basic definitions from the IS literature and review a small sample of the work that has been done in this area.

As happens with research on emergent phenomena, some overlap in terminology and definitions has occurred within the IS literature on activism, e.g., online activism and cyberactivism are two widely-used terms for the same concept. Online activism has been defined as "social activism relying on the Internet" [5, p. 54]. Early research defined cyberactivism as "political activism on the internet" [7, p. 1]. As this stream of research has expanded, broader definitions of cyberactivism have encompassed social activism that is not necessarily political. A more recent conceptualization of cyberactivism "covers a spectrum of activism ranging from individual protest actions to online social movements" [17, p. 5-6].

Cyberactivism is most successful when actors engage together in collection action. Social and functional affordances of social media facilitate collective actions on an unprecedented scale due to decreased participation costs [10, 21]. When individuals come together to engage in collective action, toward a common goal, in a burst organized activity over a short period, they form a cyberactivism campaign [e.g., 1]. Successful cyberactivism campaigns may contribute to, or even initiate a social movement. "Social movements entail prolonged, organized efforts to bring about-or inhibit-social, cultural, or political change, often related to identity" [20, p. 1]. Social movements occur at the societal level and cannot be accomplished by an individual acting alone. Social movement organizations, such as Greenpeace, engage in activism to affect public sensemaking and political environments [12]. Such organizations, like individuals, may use social technologies to frame information and bolster support for a social cause through cyberactivism.

Collective action occurs in many contexts and is not specific to social movements. However, collective action theories are useful for understanding social movements, and digital activism in general. Prior IS research examined cyberactivism campaigns and the role of digital technologies in social movements [e.g., 3, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 19]. Scholars have also applied social movement and collective action theories to understand seemingly unrelated phenomena such as information systems standardization [6], knowledge sharing [16], and open source activities [8]. A small but growing stream of research adopts a critical approach to study cyberactivism [4, 18].

2. Overview of Research in this Mini Track

One key takeaway from the IS literature on collective action, social movements, and digital technologies is that technology tools are enabling new types of protest tactics and making it more difficult for Internet users to distinguish between objective information and activism propaganda featuring campaign-specific frames of meaning [17]. Initial optimism suggested digital media might cure the ills of traditional mass media, which have become concentrated in ownership; yet, recent research suggests there is reason to view digital news media with skepticism [11]. Two of the three papers accepted to this mini track discuss "fake news". Argha

Ray and Joey George examine political conservatism and the spread of disinformation online. Using Expanded Prominence Interpretation Theory (EPIT) as a lens, Ray and George develop propositions to explain how individual differences affect attributions of credibility in the face of disinformation in the manuscript, *Online Disinformation and the Psychological Bases of Prejudice and Political Conservatism.* This research has practical value in a time when fake news, and rumors of fake news, threaten to undermine the free press in democratic countries.

Fernando Cardoso Durier da Silva, Rafael Vieira, Kate Cerqueira Revoredo, Flavia Maria Santoro and Ana Cristina Bicharra Garcia tackle the phenomenon of fake news empirically. In their manuscript, *Can Machines Learn to Detect Fake News? A Survey Focused on Social Media*, the authors conclude that effective strategies for automatic detection of fake news require that classic detection techniques be used in conjunction with other classic techniques, coordinated by a neural network. This research has practical value for social media platform owners, activists, and political leaders concerned about societal effects of fake news diffusion.

In the third paper accepted to this mini track Hyunjin Seo builds on the foundation of prior IS research, outlining a multilevel model for analyzing collective actions for social change. In her paper *Collective Action in Digital Age: A Multilevel Approach*, *she presents a* model which includes four levels of agency (i.e, individual, group, organizational, and bot) and three levels of affordance (i.e., application, network infrastructure, and social system). This research contributes to current knowledge by conceptualizing bots as agents in digital collective action and by calling attention to the need for multilevel investigations of cyberactivism.

3. Conclusion

The papers in this mini track address important topics and contribute to a growing body of research on collective action, social movements, and digital technologies. Though collective action and social movements research has mature literatures in sociology, economics, psychology, and communication, the research area of social movements and social technologies is still at a nascent stage in the information systems literature. Social media afford exposure to social injustices, large-scale participation in cyberactivism, and decreased distance between power holders and regular citizens. These affordances give cyberactivists unprecedented access to decision makers and influence on public discourse. These affordances can be used for social good, e.g., to empower the marginalized and fight for justice, or for social harm, e.g., terrorism or disinformation campaigns. As social technologies continue to be used for good and evil, information systems scholars must rise to the challenge of identifying the role of information systems research in developing insights and strategies to promote information systems use for social good. Research contributing to understanding of how to counter the "dark side" effects of information systems misuse would also provide value [2].

4. References

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